

# Motorcycles and the West Yorkshire Local Transport Plan

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I write this executive summary in my capacity as Political Officer for the Yorkshire region of the Motorcycle Action Group (MAG), which acts on behalf of all motorcyclists in the UK. In the context of this topic I especially represent those riders living and riding within West Yorkshire and, in preparing the text, have consulted with members of the sub groups, namely Huddersfield; Bradford and Leeds; and Wakefield. For the purpose of this submission I shall be using the term powered two wheelers (PTWs) owing to its extensive use in official data and to make clear that the comments apply equally to motorcycles, scooters and mopeds.

This document should be read in conjunction with *Motorcycles in West Yorkshire, A Local Transport Strategy* written by my colleague Marcus Houlden. This contains references and a detailed implementation plan. Electronic copies of both documents are available from <https://bit.ly/WYMAGLTP>.

The comments below are prompted by reading the Engagement Document made available through YourVoice and attempts made to complete the feedback questionnaire, which has proved difficult owing to a significant gap in the thinking that has shaped the draft plan. The word motorcycle only appears once in the Engagement Document and even then is illogically grouped together with cars under the heading cars. A similar condition persists in the feedback questionnaire, making it impossible to respond as a group distinct from car drivers.

This gap in understanding the full breadth of road user perspectives means that WYCA is missing an important and valuable opportunity to develop policies that would further the key aims of the Plan in the wider interests of the public, as well as bringing significant environmental benefits. These benefits include:

- The infrastructure requirements of PTWs are little different to those of bicycles in terms of dimensions and construction for both running and parking, thus very considerably less than cars.
- Congestion at busy times would be massively reduced if a higher proportion of solitary drivers were aboard PTWs
- The greater energy efficiency of PTWs, especially smaller capacity machines, would reduce the environmental impacts currently generated by cars. This benefit persists even if both modes are powered by electricity.
- Mass transit would be able to make better progress if modal shift to PTWs were to free up road-space.

It is therefore essential that PTWs be treated as a distinct group of road users within the LTP, based on greater understanding of their qualities being closer to those of bicycles than of cars.

## MODAL SHIFT AND LAST MILE OPTIONS

MAG supports the reasoning of WYCA in seeking to encourage the health and environmental benefits of modal shift away from the private car towards various forms of active travel, either for whole journeys or between home and a connection with public transport. We make no claim that PTW usage ranks as 'active travel' in this context, although far more beneficial to mind and body than the car, but we do recognise the limitations of factors such as gradient and luggage capacity that make walking or cycling impractical in some circumstances. This may apply to the whole journey being undertaken or to the nearest public transport, because it is too far or too steep or the traveller is physically disabled. In all of those instances

the PTW is the next best thing and vastly preferable to solitary travellers using a private car. (NB but see Security below)

## SAFETY

There is widespread misapprehension about the relative safety of PTWs and other modes, which is sometimes offered as a reason not to encourage modal shift in favour of PTWs. This is partly prompted by accident data but also by prejudice and failure to distinguish between danger and vulnerability. The reality is that the small size, manoeuvrability and power to weight ratio of PTWs offer many more options for collision avoidance than a car. The difference, as highlighted in the new version of Highway Code, is that the rider is more vulnerable in the event of a collision. For this reason the group ought to benefit from the same sort of protection being advocated and extensively implemented for all other vulnerable road user groups (pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists). Such consideration includes creation of dedicated road space, of which there is none for PTWs despite there being many opportunities to grant permissions for them to safely share with buses and cycles.

The LTP must therefore acknowledge the vulnerability of PTWs and introduce policies and practices that mitigate the risks associated with their use. These might include:

- Every Highway Authority to designate a specific officer to liaise with MAG on the topic of safe motorcycling. Should be sufficiently senior to have influence across the authority and ideally be a practising motorcyclist.
- Officers responsible for highway infrastructure planning, design and maintenance to undertake specialist training drawing from reference sources such as TfL's Urban Motorcycle Design Handbook.
- Recognition of infrastructure risks peculiar to PTWs, such as steel barriers with no bottom rail, central islands with poor visibility, certain types of surface defect, diesel spills etc.
- Signage in certain locations to alert other drivers to the presence of PTWs e.g. Think Bike.
- General education of other road users about the vulnerability of PTWs.

MAG supports the core values and theoretical aims of Vision Zero strategies being developed around the world, although we feel that our Welcoming Roads manifesto captures those aims without the misguided measures being advocated in some versions. The LTP should be developed in close liaison with local versions of Vision Zero if all of these considerations are to be integrated.

## SECURITY

Often mistakenly interpreted as meaning the same as safety, this relates to the vital issue of theft prevention. Without this understanding, the prospect of modal shift to PTW use is greatly reduced owing to the statistically very high risk of theft and/or damage to machines and PPE. Very little is currently being done in the region to address this risk, so the LTP should make provisions for influencing providers of infrastructure to provide space for parking PTWs with associated security measures such as locking anchors and PPE storage.

Bicycle parking infrastructure has become fairly universal but PTW facilities are a rarity and, even where available, signage is unclear and charging terms a complete mystery. Ideally parking for PTWs should be free, as for bicycles, but provision of adequate security could justify a modest charge subject to it being proportionate to the space required relative to cars and for proof of payment not being reliant on display on the machine. Facilities must be located close to public transport boarding points and included in all new public and private car parks. This needs tying in with Planning policy to ensure that the private sector also complies.

## PUBLIC IMAGE

The LTP has a duty to base its policies on factual data and not on a perceived public image based largely on mistaken identity. Genuine motorcyclists are often grouped together with unruly youngsters and criminals who use PTWs to commit crime or antisocial behaviour, often causing accidents that seriously distort the data for the category of road user. Many of the machines are stolen, uninsured and not roadworthy, further distorting statistics and contributing to the security disincentive described above. To assist in correcting this perception of image we encourage those involved in writing the LTP and delivering its policies and practices to attend some meetings with MAG and/or other gatherings of enthusiasts to see what we are really like. A fine illustration would be the recent Adventure Bike Rider Festival, which shared many qualities with popular music festivals but dispersed with no crime having occurred and no litter left behind.

## INFLUENCE SIDEWAYS AND UPWARDS

MAG is cognisant of the fact that the WYCA LTP policies will not all be binding on the member Authorities, which has permitted inconsistencies in the current implementation such as bus lane access for PTWs to be enthusiastically introduced by some yet firmly resisted by others. This inconsistency weakens the whole spirit and purpose of the LTP, so members representing the constituent Authorities are urged to read and support the recommendations of this submission, then follow through with consistent implementation across the region.

It is further recognised that some actions at regional level are constrained by national policy and legislation. WYCA is therefore urged to apply sustained pressure on Central Government to initiate policies that will facilitate the recommendations made here, recognising that the same benefits will flow everywhere else too. There are obvious areas where that should apply:

- Make PTW access to with-flow bus lanes the default position for all parts of the UK.
- Review and reform the licensing regime to remove the current disincentive to qualify for a motorcycle licence when first considering motorised personal transport.
- Grant PTWs access to cycling advance stop boxes at junctions to afford safe refuge when filtering.

## CONCLUSION

The new LTP will replace the 2017 version, which helpfully included “Motorcycles are another convenient, affordable and efficient form of transport in their use of fuel and of road space. We believe that levels of motorcycle usage could increase due to the lower costs associated with motorcycles and the limited alternative transport options in some areas.” All of the recommendations listed above are wholly consistent with this statement but take it one step further into meaningful action, achievable ONLY if PTWs are treated as a discrete category throughout.

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